

The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church

The Pope

The Pope is the supreme head of the Catholic Hierarchy, to whom all clerics are responsible. The Sacred College of Cardinals is his counseling body, but is not itself a legislative entity, and the Roman Pontiff thus has supreme jurisdiction over the Church. His jurisdictional titles are Bishop of Rome, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Primate of Italy, Patriarch of the West, and Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church. So, every metropolitan of the Roman Catholic Church is subject to him as Patriarch of the West, and every patriarch (or metropolitan or bishop not subject to a patriarch) is subject to him as Supreme Pontiff. The other ecclesiastical titles of the pope are Vicar of Jesus Christ, Servant of the Servants of God, and Successor of Saint Peter, Prince of the Apostles. In addition, he holds the temporal title of Sovereign of the State of Vatican City, making him an equal of any other worldly head of state.

The Cardinals and the Roman Curia

THE SACRED COLLEGE OF CARDINALS

The Sacred College follows the Pope in precedence in the Church, and makes up an advising body similar to a senate. The position of cardinal does not add any episcopal jurisdiction, and so is properly not a hierarchical position. A bishop or archbishop who is named a cardinal keeps his see, be it residential or titular. His authority as cardinal (papal elector, member of the consistory and college, etc) is in addition to his archiepiscopal or episcopal authority. Most cardinals are previously bishops before receiving the title, but, if they are not, they are usually ordained bishop before being made cardinal. The Church also classifies cardinals into three grades to reflect the three grades of the clergy:

Episcopal Cardinals

Cardinal-bishops are the titular bishops of the seven titular suburbicarian sees of Rome (i.e. Ostia, Palestrina, Porto-Santa Rufina, Albano, Velletri-Segni, Frascati, and Sabina-Poggio Mirteto) and, following them in seniority, all the cardinal Eastern Rite patriarchs. The Titular Bishop of Ostia is always the Dean of the Sacred College of Cardinals, who holds this suburbicarian see in addition to his other one. The six Latin Rite cardinal bishops elect from among their number the Dean and Subdean of the Sacred College of Cardinals, who are first and second among equals, making them the second and third highest ranking clerics in the Catholic Church.

Presbyteral Cardinals

Most cardinals are cardinal-priests. They are ordinaries (almost always metropolitans) who have been raised to the Cardinalate.

Diaconal Cardinals

Cardinals who are not ordinaries or cardinal-bishops are cardinal-deacons. These are usually the members of the Roman Curia who have been raised to the Cardinalate, all of whom are titular archbishops. Almost all cardinals are members of the episcopate, regardless of the class (bishop, priest, or deacon) to which they

belong.

THE ROMAN CURIA

The Roman Curia is the structure of the Holy See's government through which the work of the Pope is done. It is divided into a collection of dicasteries: congregations, tribunals, pontifical councils, offices, agencies, commissions, vicariates, and most importantly the secretariat of state.

Through these dicasteries, the Roman Pontiff governs the Universal Church.

Positions of the Episcopal Hierarchy

PATRIARCHS AND MAJOR ARCHBISHOPS

The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325) recognized three patriarchs: the bishops of Alexandria and Antioch in the East, and the Bishop of Rome in the West. From that year, the pope traditionally held among his many titles "Patriarch of the West," though this has recently stopped being used. The First Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381) added the Bishop of Constantinople to the list of patriarchs, and made his rank second only to the pope, who is Patriarch of the West. This action was affirmed by the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451) and by the Fourth Ecumenical Lateran Council (1215). Chalcedon also added the Bishop of Jerusalem to the list of patriarchs.

Today, there are twelve patriarchates in the Catholic Church: six Eastern Rite patriarchates and six Latin Rite patriarchates. The six Eastern Rite patriarchates are as follows: one of Alexandria (for the Coptic Catholic Church), three of Antioch (one each for the Syrian Catholic Church, the Maronite Catholic Church, and the Melkite Greek Catholic Church), one of Babylon (for the Chaldean Catholic Church), and one for Sis or Cilicia (for the Armenian Catholic Church). The Melkite Greek Patriarch of Antioch also has the personal titles of patriarch of Alexandria and Jerusalem and "all the East" for that church.

All Eastern Rite patriarchs are elected by the bishops of their rites, and receive approval from the pope. Each patriarch is in turn responsible directly to the pope.

Two Eastern Catholic churches (the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church) are led by "major archbishops" who are metropolitans with the rights and prerogatives of a patriarch, but not the title.

Latin Rite patriarchates were established at Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Constantinople during the Crusades, but afterwards existed as titular patriarchates only, while their patriarchs resided in Rome. Jerusalem, however, was reconstituted as a patriarchate by Pope Pius IX in 1847. In 1964, the titular patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch were abolished to relieve tension between the Eastern and Western churches. Though the Latin Rite has six patriarchs, only the pope, who is Patriarch of the West, is patriarch in the true sense that he is the leader of his church (the Roman Catholic Church) to whom all metropolitans are responsible. The other five Latin Rite "patriarchates" are only titles of honor, and are as follows: Jerusalem, Lisbon, Venice, the East Indies, and the West Indies. The Patriarchate of the West Indies has been vacant since 1963, and so there are only five active Latin Rite patriarchs today.

PRIMATES

"Primate" is an honorary title, not used at all in the United States, for the highest

ranking prelate of a geographic region. The title of primate is used officially for entire countries, not regions within, and is common in Europe. A country might have more than one province in it, but one of the metropolitan archbishops will be called the primate of the country as the highest ranking prelate by seniority, not by jurisdiction. There is no primate of the United States, but the Metropolitan Archbishop of Mexico City is the Primate of Mexico, and there are many primateships in Europe and in other places. This title is purely a pre-eminence of honor, not of jurisdiction, making a primate the "first among equals" with respect to the other metropolitans in his primateship.

ARCHBISHOPS

There are four types of archbishops: metropolitan, titular, coadjutor, and emeritus. Coadjutor and titular archbishops and archbishops emeriti are just like their counterparts among the bishops. A metropolitan archbishop administers an ecclesiastical province, which is a group of two or more dioceses, while at the same time administering his own diocese (called the archdiocese, or metropolis). In his archdiocese, his title is archbishop. In his province, his title is metropolitan. The dioceses which make up a province (except the archdiocese) are called suffragans. Every metropolitan is responsible to the patriarch of his church. If his church has no patriarch, he is responsible directly to the pope. [In most Eastern Catholic churches, the title "eparch" takes the place of bishop, and "archeparch" for archbishop. In these cases, an "eparchy" is like a diocese and an "archeparchy" like an archdiocese.]

BISHOPS

There are five types of bishops: ordinaries, auxiliaries, coadjutors, titulars, and emeriti.

Ordinary Bishops

Ordinaries are the bishops you usually think of. They are the regular administrators of a diocese, their see, and there is only one (and always one) ordinary per diocese. Sometimes they are referred to as "diocesan bishops." The noun "ordinary" refers to a prelate who holds jurisdictional control over a geographical area (from a regular bishop to the pope himself). Every ordinary bishop is responsible to his metropolitan.

Auxiliary Bishops

Auxiliary bishops assist the ordinary in the diocese. They enjoy the full rights of any consecrated bishop, but exercise control of their diocese as subordinates of the ordinary. Auxiliary bishops are always given titular sees.

Titular Bishops

Titular bishops are bishops who have only a titular see; that is, the see no longer exists, and there is no geographical diocese. The titular bishopric is thus simply a title of honor, the bishopric itself usually an ancient see from the Mediterranean or Holy Land. All auxiliary bishops are titular bishops of some such see. Those bishops and archbishops who work in the Roman Curia hold titular sees.

Coadjutor Bishops

Coadjutor bishops are the same as auxiliary bishops, except that they hold their episcopate *cum iure successionis* (with the Right of Succession) in the given see. That is, if a man is named coadjutor bishop of a diocese, he would have the same authority as the auxiliary bishop(s), if any, but would be assured the diocesan bishopric on the death, transfer, or retirement of the ordinary. Coadjutors are usually only named when the diocesan bishop is in very poor health, dying, or near retirement, desiring a smooth transition.

Bishops Emeriti

Bishops emeriti are retired bishops who have given up control of their see due to old age. A bishop emeritus still keeps the title of the bishopric as a sign of honor and respect.

Organization of a Diocese

THE BISHOP AND DIOCESAN CURIA

A diocese is the particular Church, led by a bishop, which is the basic unit of the Hierarchy. The diocesan bishop is the immediate and proper authority over his particular Church. He is sometimes assisted by auxiliary bishops, who enjoy the episcopal character but are subordinates of the ordinary. The bishop is assisted in the governing of the diocese by the diocesan curia. The vicars general are the auxiliary bishops of the diocese and one non-episcopal priest whose duty it is to assist the ordinary in the governance of the entire diocese. Episcopal vicars are those priests or auxiliary bishops who assist the ordinary in the governance of a specific geographic region of the diocese, which in turn is divided into vicariates forane or deaneries. A vicariate forane or deanery is a collection of neighboring parishes for the promotion and coordination of pastoral activity. One of the parish pastors of the vicariate is named the vicar forane or dean. Also part of the diocesan curia are the chancellor, vice-chancellor, and other diocesan notaries, whose job it is to record the decrees, dispositions, obligations, etc. of the diocese and diocesan officials. Further, every diocese includes a finance council, headed by a finance officer, to handle the diocese's financial affairs. Finally, the diocese has a presbyteral council or senate, a group of priests who form a consultative body to advise the ordinary in matters of diocesan governance.

PARISHES

The smallest unit of diocesan jurisdiction is the parish, by which is meant not only the church building itself, but also a geographic area around the parish, such that the entire diocese is divided into parishes. The spiritual needs of those living in this geographical area are provided for by the parish. The pastor is the priest named by the bishop of the diocese as head of a parish. If the spiritual needs of the parish are too extensive to be cared for by one priest, the diocese may appoint other priests to serve under the pastor in the administration of the parish. Such priests are called parochial vicars or associate pastors. Deacons, also, are assigned to larger parishes to assist in its liturgical, pastoral, and communal operations. Lectors and acolytes are non-sacramental orders that come before the diaconate on a seminarian's way to the priesthood. The bulk of the parish is made up of the Catholic faithful. They make up the parish, finance, and liturgy councils, and serve the church as readers, altar servers, ushers, cantors, musicians, and extraordinary ministers of the Holy Eucharist.

MONSIGNORS

Some priests have been nominated by their bishop for the papal honor of membership in the *monsignori*. There are three classes of the *monsignori*: Protonotaries Apostolic, Prelates of Honor of His Holiness, and Chaplains of His Holiness (in descending order of precedence). Those diocesan priests who are Protonotaries Apostolic are known as "Supranumerary," distinct from the seven monsignors of the Roman Curia known as Protonotaries Apostolic de Numero. Most diocesan monsignors are Prelates of Honor, however a vicar general who is already a monsignor is promoted to the Protonotaries Apostolic *ipso iure*.

THE OLD MINOR AND MAJOR ORDERS

Before Vatican II there were five non-sacramental orders below the episcopate, priesthood, and diaconate: porter, lector, exorcist, acolyte, and subdeacon. The porter was a caretaker for the church and an usher and guard at mass. The lector was an "official" reader, as still exists today. The exorcists originally may have been commissioned to expel demons, but later mainly dealt with Catechumens, sometimes performing the minor pre-baptismal exorcisms on them and telling them when to leave Mass before the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The acolyte was an "official" altar server and still exists today. The subdeacon performed various duties at the altar. These "orders" made people part of the clergy and came with the accompanying privileges. The first four were "minor orders" and you could drop out at any time (although you would lose clerical status and privileges). The subdeacon, the deacon, and the priest were the "major orders" and, although the subdiaconate was non-sacramental, once you were in the major orders you were obligated to get fully ordained to the priesthood, and were bound by celibacy and to recitation of the breviary.